

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, managers must give priority to the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) when developing land use plans. An ACEC is an area where special management attention is required to protect important historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems; or to protect life and provide for safety from natural hazards. Several areas have been nominated within the planning area for consideration as ACECs and will be evaluated as part of the RMP planning process. Additional ACEC nominations may be submitted during the scoping period for the RMP. All nominations will be reviewed and evaluated before alternatives for the RMP are developed.

AREAS ALREADY NOMINATED FOR ACEC STATUS

- Madison River Corridor for national recreational values and features.
- Virginia City Historic District for significant historic and archaeological values.
- Axolotl Lakes area for unique values, including the Axolotl salamander, and scientific and recreational opportunities.
- The Block Mountain area has been nominated as a Research Natural Area for the educational value of the geologic resources on public land.
- Upper Centennial Basin Bald Eagle Nesting Areas for bald eagle nesting habitat.
- Sage Creek as valuable habitat for antelope and sage grouse.
- Lima Reservoir as crucial molting habitat for Pacific Flyway Canada geese
- Muddy Creek/Big Sheep Creek for cultural, wildlife and fisheries values, and highly erosive soils.
- Everson Creek for significant archaeological and paleontological values.
- Badger Gulch as valuable habitat for antelope and sage grouse.
- Bannack Historic District for significant historic and archaeological values.
- The Centennial Mountains from Nemesis Mountain to Price Creek for diversity of flora and fauna, aesthetic landscapes, and frail, unstable watersheds.

- Clark Canyon for fragile, unstable soils.
- Maiden Rock area for bighorn sheep habitat.
- East Fork Blacktail Deer Creek for wildlife habitat, especially elk winter range.
- Ferruginous Hawk Nesting Area for crucial nesting habitat.

Two areas nominated in the Dillon Management Framework Plan (1979) are now administered by the BLM's Butte Field Office. The Soap Gulch-Camp Creek area (bighorn sheep habitat) and the Jerry Johnson Creek (deer and elk winter range) are located in Silver Bow County. These nominations will not be considered in the Dillon RMP effort, but will be reviewed by the Butte Field Office when undertaking planning efforts.

STEPS IN THE ACEC EVALUATION PROCESS

The ACEC process is comprised of the following steps:

- Compile a list of areas based on past nominations and new nominations.
- Obtain information on relevance and importance
- Review nominated areas and document whether they meet the relevance and importance criteria.
- Drop areas not meeting criteria.
- Develop management prescriptions for areas meeting the criteria
- Incorporate management prescriptions in plan alternatives and analyze effects of prescriptions on other resource uses as well as effects of other resource use on ACEC values.
- Prepare and release Draft RMP including a Preferred Alternative identifying areas for ACEC designation and management.
- Accept public comments on the Draft RMP including ACEC recommendations and analysis.
- Make adjustments if necessary based on public comment.
- Release proposed RMP and sign ROD which officially designates ACECs.

NEW ACEC NOMINATIONS

Nominations for ACEC designation should be accompanied by descriptive materials, maps, and evidence of the relevance and importance of the resources or hazards to be considered. **If you want to nominate an area for consideration as an ACEC, please submit the following information by October 19th to Renee Johnson, RMP Project Leader, BLM Dillon Field Office, 1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, MT 59725.**

- 1) A map at 1:24,000 scale depicting the boundary you are suggesting for your nomination.
- 2) A narrative discussion about why the resource or hazard meets the “relevance” criteria.
- 3) A narrative discussion about why the resource or hazard meets the “importance” criteria.

RELEVANCE CRITERIA

An area meets the “relevance” criteria if it contains one or more of the following:

- A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archaeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to Native Americans).
- A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).
- A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).
- Natural hazards (including but not limited to areas of avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs). A hazard caused by human action may meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the RMP process that it has become part of a natural process.

IMPORTANCE CRITERIA

The value, resource, system, process, or hazard that is present in the nominated area has substantial significance if it is characterized by one or more of the following:

- Has more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.
- Has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.
- Has qualities which warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
- Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.